



ADVENT SERIES: "GOD WITH US"

THE UNEXPECTED GOD • LUKE 1:1-38 • 12.5.21

MAIN POINT

God used faithful people to achieve His purpose of redemption through Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What's your favorite "unexpected" detail in the story of Jesus' birth? In another story from Scripture?

Why do you think God chooses to work in ways that surprise us? What's one unexpected way God has worked in your life lately?

The Gospel of Luke begins with an angel promising the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. As we study, we'll see a common theme develop—God's use of the unexpected to bring Jesus into the world. Scripture from Genesis to Revelation shows that God often works in unexpected ways, just as He does in our lives today.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

READ LUKE'S PROLOGUE IN LUKE 1:1-4.

Why did Luke write this Gospel account, according to verses 1-4?

Luke said he wrote his Gospel to present “an orderly account” (1:3) of God’s fulfilling His promise to provide a Deliverer through whom people can be saved from their sins. The entirety of his Gospel describes Jesus as that Deliverer, the perfect human and Savior.

Luke was a physician, a Gentile, and a companion on some of Paul’s journeys. Based on these details, what might you expect to find in his Gospel?

READ LUKE 1:5-25.

What characteristics of Zechariah and Elizabeth made them good candidates for a special assignment from God?

Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth lived rightly before God, obeyed the laws, and met the expectations of the Lord. Unfortunately, they were childless. Zechariah had reached an advanced age and yet continued to serve God faithfully even though God seemingly had not answered his prayer for a child.

What do you do when your prayers go unanswered? How is your relationship with God affected?

What emotions did Zechariah experience when Gabriel appeared? Put yourself in the place of the two parents. What would you think and feel as you listened to the angel?

How did the angel say John's birth and life would affect his parents and others?

The nature of John's ministry was to bring God's people back to the Lord. He would serve as the forerunner of the Messiah, through whom God's kingdom would break into human history. We'll take a closer look at this in Luke 3:1-22.

Why did Zechariah doubt the angel's word that he would have a son (v. 18)? How can you relate to his reaction? What was the angel's response?

READ LUKE 1:26-38.

What parallels do you see between these verses predicting Jesus' birth and the previous set of verses predicting John the Baptist's birth?

In both stories we get an introduction to the parents, angelic prophecies, signs, statements about each child's mission, and unexpected pregnancies. We also see affirmation of God's grace at work. Elizabeth acknowledged God's favor in her life (v. 25) and the angel described Mary as "highly favored" by God. This favor wasn't based on either woman's merit, but on God's grace in their lives.

In what ways do you sometimes take God's grace for granted? What do our day-to-day lives reveal about our appreciation for God's grace?

Why do you think Mary was troubled (v. 29)? What dangers did she face?

Mary was betrothed to Joseph, which made them legally husband and wife even though the marriage wasn't finalized. Discuss what possible legal and social consequences Mary and Joseph might have faced as a result of her being pregnant out of wedlock.

What did the angel's description of the child (vv. 31-33) mean to a Jew at the time of Jesus' birth? What does it mean to people today?

What attitudes are revealed by Mary's question (v. 34) and statement (v. 38)? Why did Mary refer to herself as a slave? Why do people shy away from the idea of submitting to God like a slave?

How did Mary's reaction to the angel's news compare with Zechariah's reaction in Luke 1:11-18? What are a few key differences between questioning God (as Zechariah did) and asking questions of Him (like Mary)?

Zechariah didn't believe God's ability to give him and his wife a son, and he asked for a sign to prove God's words were true. Mary voiced confusion over the logistics of how she'd have a child, but she never acknowledged skepticism or doubt. These two responses show us an important distinction between questioning God and asking questions of Him.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

The angel told Mary, “Nothing is impossible with God.” Present a situation in your life when God did the impossible from a human perspective. Describe the impact of that experience.

Why does God want us to be totally obedient to Him?

What is the connection between our understanding of Jesus’ identity and our willingness to accept the truth of the gospel? What keeps people from submitting to the truth about Jesus?

PRAYER

Close your group time in prayer, asking God to strengthen our faith and our courage to obey Him. Thank Him for sending Jesus and for the salvation available through Him. Pray that God will open our eyes to Jesus’ identity and His work in our lives through our study of Luke.

COMMENTARY

LUKE 1:1-38

Luke began his narrative about the events of Jesus’ life and ministry with a formal preface. This was a common practice in historical works of Luke’s era. A number of others had previously written about the life and works of Jesus. This may include the Gospels of Mark and Matthew since they preceded Luke’s writing. “Events... fulfilled among us” speaks of how Jesus fulfilled many Old Testament prophecies. Original eyewitnesses included Mary, the mother of Jesus, about whom Luke wrote more than

any other New Testament author. Luke's stated purpose in writing his Gospel was to provide historical certainty and theological clarity for Theophilus in regard to what he had been taught about Jesus.

1:5-7 Zechariah was of the line of Aaron, Israel's first high priest. Elizabeth, too, was a descendent of Aaron. Luke pointed out that they were upright in the sight of God and not just in outward appearance. Luke underscored Zechariah's and Elizabeth's dedication by declaring that this couple blamelessly followed both God's commandments and His regulations. This couple had committed themselves to faithfully follow God's will. Luke indicated that they had no children. Zechariah and Elizabeth's childlessness caused them great sorrow and perhaps even produced in them a sense of inferiority. The reference to Zechariah and Elizabeth's childlessness along with their advanced ages points to the human impossibility of the birth of a son and emphasizes the miraculous nature of God's intervention in their lives with the birth of John the Baptist.

1:11-13 Zechariah encountered an angel of the Lord in the holy place. The term translated "appeared" often denotes divine manifestation. Of course, the elderly priest was startled at the angel's sudden arrival. Zechariah also was gripped with fear. The angel, seeing Zechariah's discomfort, quickly told him not to be afraid. Then the angel revealed his reason for being there. The angel told Zechariah that his prayer had been heard and was about to be answered. Both the prayer for a child and the prayer for the Messiah would receive an answer in the same event, for their son would prepare the way for the Messiah. The angel instructed Zechariah to name that son John. John means "the LORD has been gracious." Probably this name underscored God's grace as it was being extended either to Zechariah in giving him a son or, more likely, to Israel in sending the Messiah.

1:14-17 Then the angel informed Zechariah of the effect of his son's ministry. John would be a joy and delight to his father and mother. Further, many others would rejoice because of his birth. The people of Israel longed for a prophetic voice for they had not heard one for centuries. John would be that voice. The Savior about whom John would witness would bring and still is bringing joy to people throughout the world. The angel then stated certain characteristics that would lie behind John's effective ministry. John would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth.

1:18-20 Zechariah asked for some assurance regarding the truth of the angel's message. He protested that he and his wife were too old to produce a child. This

expression of unbelief strongly displeased the heavenly messenger. The angel insisted he, Gabriel, had come to the temple from the presence of God to tell Zechariah “this good news.” Gabriel announced that Zechariah would be unable to speak until the day when the imparted prophecy had been fulfilled.

1:26-27 The announcement of Jesus’ birth carried the authority of God. It came in the sixth month, a reference to the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy with John the Baptist. Both that message and this one came through God’s authorized representative—the angel Gabriel. The truth of this announcement came from the highest source. The term virgin emphasized the purity associated with a young, unmarried woman. Although engaged to a man named Joseph, Mary did not yet live with Joseph. In first-century Jewish culture, engagement (or betrothal) bound them together legally as husband and wife. The wedding and consummation of the marriage, however, followed at a later time. Luke identified Mary’s husband, Joseph, as a member of the house of David. The Jews knew from the Scriptures that the future Messiah would be a descendant of the great King David. This fact supported the identification of Jesus as King. The Child to be born, then, would be identified with the lineage through which the Messiah had been promised (see Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-5).

1:28-31 The angel greeted Mary with the words, “Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you.” Mary, a normal Galilean girl, received favored status not because she was in some way unique or sinless but because God selected her for a high honor. Gabriel delivered a shocking message to the young Mary. She would conceive and give birth to a son. The idea of conception by a woman not yet married made this a hard statement to accept. The angel even provided the name of the Child—Jesus. The name Jesus means “Deliverer, Savior.”

1:32-33 With this verse Luke began a description of who Jesus is. His greatness indicated that He would be more than human. Normally the term “great” referred to God. The exalted title “Son of the Most High” also connected Jesus with God. As Most High, God reigns over all creation. As a descendant of King David, Jesus would occupy the great king’s throne to carry on the just and righteous reign of God on earth (see Isa. 9:7; Dan. 7:14). These titles look to Jesus as the Messiah and emphasize His divine nature. Jesus’ reign as Messiah-King will last forever. It will be a kingdom with no end. The eternal reign coincided with the Old Testament view of the Messiah. The phrase “house of Jacob” stood for Israel as a nation. Luke, however, understood God’s people to be all who by faith gave God authority over their lives.

Thus Jesus came to establish Himself as King over a kingdom not limited by earthly boundaries.

1:34-35 Mary took in the angel's comments about the Child to come. Her question about it, however, set up the further explanation offered in verse 35. She questioned how a virgin could conceive and give birth. The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead, is God present in His power. He acted to make the conception happen apart from the normal biological process. Mary's human abilities played no part in this process. She simply made herself available to God. Luke identified the Child as the holy One. Only God makes things holy. "Holiness" indicates something or someone set aside by God to be used to accomplish His purpose.

1:36-38 The angel urged Mary to consider the case of her relative Elizabeth. He offered further evidence of God's power to assure Mary. God enabled a childless woman to give birth and a virgin to be pregnant. Mary made herself available for God to work through her. She accepted slave status, which meant total submission and obedience. Nothing else needed to be said after Mary's affirmation of faith. So the angel left her. This departure indicated the settlement of the matter in Mary's heart. Things could move forward.